NRI Grooms should be made compulsory under those statutes where it is not compulsory. The other important suggestions include bilateral agreements between India and the other countries with large Indian Diaspora, Government monitored conciliation process for settlement of matrimonial disputes, mediation/conciliation centres, proper distribution of property under the law in case of divorce, treating suppression of marital status by NRI grooms under criminal law, amendment of Foreign Marriage Act 1969 and easy access to the embassies/consulates for the aggrieved wives of the NRI husbands.

(b) and (c) Government is aware of the problems in serveral NRI marriages. The matter is under discussion with the Ministries and agencies concerned. The preparation of the booklet to disseminate information on procedures for pre-marital verification of the intending partners, legal action in India and overseas, utilizing the services of local/foreign NGOs, conseling and amicable settlement, legal aid etc. has been agreed upon. A separate session on Private International Law with a focus on a separate Law/ Convention to tacle the problem of NRI marriages is being organized at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Mumbai on 8 January 2005. The matter would be pursued further in the light of the recommendations at the above session.

Facilities to Gramin Dak Sevaks

*235. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether three lakh Gramin Dak Sevaks maintaining communications services to rural Indian are being denied all facilities and benefits despite Supreme Court's ruling to treat them as holders of civilian posts;

(b) the details of their pending demands; and

(c) the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) The Hon'ble Supreme Court, in the case of P.K. Rajamma, 1977 (3) SCC 1994, has held that although an Extra Departmental Agent (EDA), now called Gramin Dak Sevak (GDS) holds a civil post under the administrative control of the State, such a post is outside the regular Civil Services. The EDAs now

called Gramin Dak Sevaks, therefore, do not form part of the regular Civil Services as they are not regular Government employees, but a class apart. They are part-time employees employed for a period upto a maximum of 5 hours per day. Consequent upon the recommendations of the Justice Talwar Committee, the issue of grant of status of regular Govt. employees to the Gramin Dak Sevaks was examined by the Group of Ministers (GoM) and thereafter by the Government in 1998, but not accepted. Subsequently while examining the issue of change of nomenclature of the Extra Departmental Agents, the matter was again considered by the Group of Ministers and thereafter by the Government in December, 2000 but rejected. As such Gramin Dak Sevaks are not eligible for all benefits and facilities which are admissible to the regular Government employees. Their terms and conditions of employment are governed by a separate set of rules called Gramin Dak Sevaks Conduct & Employment Rules, 2001.

(b) The Gramin Dak Sevaks have been making demands, the major ones being grant of status, for grant of pension (Social Security), maternity leave for women GDSs, all trade union facilities for the office bearers of their union & merger of 50% Dearness Allowance with the Time Related Continuity Allowance.

(c) The reaction of the Govt. on the above issues is as below:

Demand for grant of pension/social security: While examining the recommendations of Justice Talwar Committee set up in 1995, the Government did not find the demand for grant of pension feasible. However, a new element *viz.* Severance Amount of Rs. 20,000/- or 30,000/- depending on the period of employment has been introduced w.e.f. 17.12.1998.

Demand for grant of maternity leave: The recommendation of the Justice Talwar Committee for grant of leave including maternity leave was considered by the Government. However, paid leave at the rate of 10 days for each half year without the facility of carry forward or encashment was accepted. Further Gramin Dak Sevaks can avail leave without allowances upto maximum of 180 days in a year.

Demand for grant of all trade union facilities: The All India Postal Extra Departmental Employees Union has already been availing of a number of trade union facilities. However, their demand for grant of facility of Foreign Service and Special Casual Leave was considered by the Government, but not accepted due to the reasons that these are available only to the Associations/Unions of regular Government servants.

Demand for Merger of 50% Dearness Allowance (DA) with Time Related Continuity Allowance (TRCA) of Gramin Dak Sevaks: The Government had allowed Time Related Continuity Allowance (TRCA) of Gramin Dak Sevaks: as full and final settlement of Justice Talwar Committee recommendations and Cabinet had approved merger of DA only for regular Central Government employees. Therefore, the benefit of merger of 50% DA with TRCA has not been extended to the GDSs who are outside the regular Civil Service.

Recovery of outstanding dues of MTNL and BSNL

*236. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the arrears by way of telephone dues payable by the Central Government and the State Governments to MTNL and BSNL as at September end this year;

(b) the steps taken to recover and clear the dues so far and the success achieved in such recoveries, indicating the latest balance of the arrears; and

(c) whether any State Governments have asked the telephone authorities not to disconnect the telephones for defaults in payment; if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) The arrears of telephone dues payable by the Central Government and State Governments to MTNL and BSNL as at September end is as under:—

	Central Government	State Government
MTNL	Rs. 17 crores	Rs. 3 crores
BSNL	Rs. 56 crores	Rs. 223 crores

(b) The steps taken to recover and clear the dues so far are as under:—

(i) Telephonic reminders are issued to the defaulting subscribers.

(ii) Personal visits are made by senior officers to the concerned Department.